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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is said to be to expand the scope of inquiry into the nature of factors influencing white adults' opposition to busing by reporting findings from a survey of a representative cross section of white adults in the U.S. Data for the study are from the Spring 1972 General Social Survey of the National Data Program for the Social Sciences conducted by the National Opinion Research Center. The population is the total non-institutional population of the U.S., 18 years or older. Analysis is confined to 1348 white respondents. The dependent variable, opposition to busing, was derived from responses to Question 48. Four independent variables were used in the analysis. Sex and years of schooling completed are straightforward status variables. The third independent variable indicates simply whether or not the respondent has any school-aged children at home. The fourth independent variable, racial prejudice, was a six-item Guttman scale. Multivariate cross tabulation was used. The most striking general findings are the very high levels of opposition to busing that persist across important status and attitudinal characteristics among white adults. Only among college educated women with no school aged children, who also have low racial prejudice, does the opposition to busing begin to approach an even split. (Author/JM)

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Resistance of White Adults to the Busing of School Children

by
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A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C., April 3, 1975.

One of the most controversial educational issues of the 1970's is the use of busing for school integration. Busing is of such concern that NBC television network coverage of last election night (November 5, 1974) included it among the issues to which a scientifically selected sample of approximately five thousand potential voters responded. Not surprisingly, 77 per cent of those polled opposed busing, 15 per cent favored busing, and 8 per cent had no opinion. That busing is also an emotion-laden and potentially volatile issue is illustrated by the violence and racial conflict which has already occurred during the 1974-75 year in the public schools of Boston.

Since busing is used most frequently for racial desegregation of public schools, there is a tendency for people to assume that the primary factor underlying white adults' opposition to busing is racial prejudice. In discussing findings of widespread racial prejudice among whites in the United States, Campbell (1971: 162) wrote ". . . the white population of this country is far from a general acceptance of the principal and practice of racial equality." Noel (1972) even goes so far as to suggest that there is an underlying normative pressure among whites to be prejudiced against blacks. Mechanisms of and factors influencing racial prejudice are systematically analyzed by Allport's (1958) classic treatise and, more recently, by Ehrlich (1973).

The racial prejudice explanation may, however, be too simplistic. Some recent research dealing specifically with busing illustrates the complexity of the factors influencing opposition to busing. For instance, in a study

of school integration in Richmond, California, Rubin (1972) presents a very interesting analysis of conflicting white interest groups' efforts to influence desegregation plans. Rubin's work deals systematically with what she terms "status politics." She discusses dynamics of prejudice in both advantaged and disadvantaged whites that gravitated against facilitating a desegregation plan involving the busing of school children. Some general relationships suggested by Rubin's work are that opposition to busing is directly related to low social status, to limited political power, and to racial prejudice. In a similar vein, findings from a survey of parents and teachers in Berkeley, California (Jensen, 1970) showed that more females than males favored busing, and that favorableness toward busing was positively related to parents' educational level. One problem with both of these studies is their limited generalizability due to their single school system focus. However, they do suggest some correlates of opposition to busing that require additional investigation, in particular, racial prejudice (high), education (low), and sex (male).

The primary purpose of this paper is to expand the scope of inquiry into the nature of factors influencing white adults' opposition to busing by reporting findings from a survey of a representative cross-section of white adults in the United States.

Study Design

Data for the study are from the Spring, 1972 General Social Survey of the National Data Program for the Social Sciences conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.

The universe sampled in this study is the total non-institutional population of the United States, 18 years of age or older. The sample is a standard multistage area probability sample to the block or segment level. At the block level, however, quota sampling is used with quotas based on sex and age. (Davis, 1972: 49)

Analysis is confined to the 1348 white respondents in the total sample of 1613. A detailed description of the items in the survey, including their use in previous surveys and, in some instances, item reliabilities, can be found in the codebook for the survey (Davis, 1972). The data and the codebook can be obtained from the Roper Public Opinion Research Center at Williams College.

The dependent variable, opposition to busing, was derived from responses to Question 48: "In general, do you favor or oppose the busing of Negro and white school children from one school district to another?" (86% oppose)

Four independent variables were used in the analysis. Sex (Question 62) and years of schooling (Question 60A) completed are straightforward status variables. The third independent variable is a binary variable indicating simply whether or not the respondent has any school-aged children at home. This variable was chosen because people with school-aged children are presumably more directly affected by school desegregation plans than others with no school-aged children. It was not possible to determine from the data whether school-aged children were enrolled in public or private schools.

The fourth independent variable, racial prejudice, was a six-item

Guttman scale. One point was assigned for each "prejudiced" response. Responses coded "Don't know" and "No answer" were treated as missing data and excluded from the analysis. Only racial prejudice scale scores derived from valid responses to all six items were used. The items were: Question 40, "Do you think Negroes should have as good a chance as white people to get any kind of job, or do you think white people should have the first chance at any kind of job?" (3% white people first); Question 39, "Do you think white students and Negro students should go to the same schools or to separate schools?" (15% separate schools); Question 42, "How strongly would you object if a member of your family wanted to bring a Negro friend home to dinner?" (13% strongly, 16% mildly); Question 41, "Do you think there should be laws against marriage between Negroes and whites?" (39% yes); Question 43B, "White people have a right to keep Negroes out of their neighborhoods if they want to, and Negroes should respect that right." (22% agree strongly, 18% agree slightly); and Question 43A, "Negroes shouldn't push themselves where they're not wanted." (45% agree strongly, 31% agree slightly). Scores on the racial prejudice scale could range from zero to six. Its coefficient of reproducibility (Guttman, 1950) was .90; its coefficient of scalability (Menzel, 1953) was .60.

Data analysis was accomplished by means of multivariate crosstabulation because three of the five variables considered (sex, presence of school-aged children at home, and opposition to busing) are categorical variables. Because the pervasiveness of opposition to busing is so great, I decided that it would be most instructive to report the actual magnitude of opposition across categories, rather than reporting parametric measures of association as was

done by Kelley (1974). Multivariate crosstabulation is also less sensitive to marginal distributions than parametric techniques. Furthermore, Kelley's regression results for opposition to busing are unreliable because he is using both categorical and interval independent variables to predict a categorical dependent variable which has an extremely low variance. Racial prejudice scores were dichotomized at the median, though the effects of racial prejudice are somewhat overestimated because 54% of the cases fell in the "high" category. Education was dichotomized on logical grounds, with people having a high school diploma or less in the "low" category and those having at least some college in the "high" category. The imbalance here is with the "high" category, since only 15 per cent of the respondents have completed at least some college.

Percentages and weighted net percentage differences (Shady, 1970) are reported. Spady (1970: 3,4) describes the weighted net percentage difference and the percentage difference, in general, as follows:

. . . the Weighted Net Percentage Difference (WNPD), is a particularly convenient and useful technique for computing the net (or partial) "effect" of a given ordinal or categorical independent variable on a categorical dependent variable, holding constant the influence of the other independent variables in the data set.

In general, the larger a percentage difference the more the dependent variable varies according to changes in the independent variable, i.e., the more they are related.

For a detailed discussion of the computational techniques for calculating

both total sample and partial weighted net percentage differences, see Spady (1970).

Findings

Table 1 is a third-order percentage table showing the relationships among opposition to busing and the four independent variables - sex, racial prejudice, education, and presence of school-aged children at home. As can be seen from this table, college-educated white men with high racial prejudice are the most opposed to busing. College-educated women, in contrast, with low racial prejudice and no school-aged children are the least opposed to busing. Fifty-seven per cent is still, however, more than half of the people in the category. Table 2 shows the weighted net percentage difference in opposition to busing attributable to the net effect of each independent variable, controlling for the other three independent variables. Relationships are also partitioned by educational attainment in Table 2.

As was expected, there is a significant, positive, net effect of both racial prejudice and low educational attainment on opposition to busing. The relatively small, but statistically significant (for computational formula for t-statistic see Spady, 1970: 9, footnote 11) net relationship between racial prejudice and opposition to busing suggests a more consistent undercurrent of racial prejudice than that acknowledged by Kelley (1974) in his analysis of the same data. Admittedly, a net effect of 6.9 per cent is rather small. But, given the very high level of opposition to busing among the white adults in this sample, such a small difference is worth noting. It seems strange that Kelley would dismiss the effect of

racism on opposition to busing, especially since he reports what is, for his type of analysis, a rather high correlation (.25 when corrected for attenuation) between opposition to busing and racial prejudice (Kelley, 1974: 30, Table 2).

The present analysis does agree with Kelley's on the large relationship among racial prejudice and opposition to busing that appears when respondents with at least some college are treated separately, a net effect of 21.4 per cent. However, a small net difference (4.2%) also appeared among the low education category. Again, this is notable due to both the pervasiveness of anti-busing sentiments among those with a high school education or less and the large size of this group.

One additional finding of some interest from Table 2 is the very strong net relationship between being male and opposition to busing that appears among men with at least some college education. Interestingly, Kelley's (1974) mode of analysis led him to ignore sex differences.

Discussion

The most striking general finding in the study is the very high levels of opposition to busing that persist across important status and attitudinal characteristics among white adults. Only among college-educated women with no school-aged children who also have low racial prejudice does the opposition to busing begin to approach an even split (57%). Not only is this group of people in the sample small (n=21), but it is also a group which is not notable for its influence on local educational policy. Equally alarming are the strong net relationships that appear for the educational elite between:

a) racial prejudice and opposition to busing, and b) being male and opposition to busing. Clearly, those individuals most likely to influence educational policy are also the most likely to have their judgments influenced by undercurrents of racial prejudice.

There are no solutions suggested by these findings. Perhaps the recognition of the striking parameters of the dilemma will lead to a more careful consideration of policies designed to ease the very pervasive tension existing among white adults with respect to the busing of school children.

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TABLE 1

Percentage of White Adults Opposed to the Busing of School Children by
Education, Racial Prejudice, Sex, and School-Aged Children in the Home

Education	Racial Prejudice	Men		Women	
		School-Aged Children Some	School-Aged Children None	School-Aged Children Some	School-Aged Children None
High School or less	High	90.7 ^a (129)	88.8 (134)	92.5 (133)	88.7 (133)
	Low	87.3 (102)	84.5 (84)	81.2 (117)	91.7 (72)
Some College or more	High	100.0 (16)	100.0 (21)	66.7 (3)	77.8 (9)
	Low	80.0 (30)	69.7 (33)	61.9 (21)	57.1 (21)

^a Base N for the percentage

TABLE 2

Weighted Net Percentage Differences in White Adults' Opposition to Busing
Resulting From Racial Prejudice, Sex, School-Aged Children in the Home, and
Education

Variable (Greater Percentage Opposition to Busing)	Education		Total Sample
	High School or less	Some College or more	
Racial Prejudice (High)	4.2*	21.4*	6.9*
Sex (Male)	0.3	18.8*	2.5
School-Aged Children (Some)	0.1	4.7	0.7
Education (High School or Less)	-	-	10.0*

* $p < .05$